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Interview with Adam Hill

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Adam Hill

INTERVIEW WITH ADAM HILL

English Lecturer at Cal Poly

Adam Hill is a Lecturer in English at Cal Poly and is running for the San Luis Obispo Board of Supervisors. www.adamhill.us/

Moebius: What is your background and interest in politics?

AH: I received a Government and Politics degree from the University of Maryland, focusing on public policy, a very practical approach. I had many wonderful professors who had worked in government at one time. One of them who comes to mind was Jimmy Carter's economic adviser. I was near the Washington, D.C. area, and of course that was a great place for political activity. I saw many speakers—presidential candidates, activists, politicians, and ambassadors. It was very inspiring. The Washington Post became the paper I read daily; as a young student, I realized that I needed a lot of background information, not only about politics but about the world. A lot heated up during the Reagan administration, particularly issues with Central American and South Africa. I became involved with the Apartheid protests and worked on divestiture issues. Then I volunteered for Bill Bradley's New Jersey senatorial campaign. I canvassed my hometown, trying to reach voters. Bradley was a big basketball hero to me. I eventually interned in his office and became his staffer in the Senate. As wonderful as that experience was, I became disheartened, sort of lost my innocence. I saw how money influenced everything in Washington and how difficult it was to get important work accomplished.

Moebius: What political books have you read that influenced you?

AH: Bill Bradley's *New American Story* and Barack Obama's book, *The Audacity of Hope*. Both have messages to which people respond positively. Both Bradley and Obama believe that the red/blue divide needs to be resolved. Drew Westin's *The Political Brain* is fascinating, as is George Lakoff's *Think Like an Elephant*.

Moebius: What books would you recommend?

AH: *The Myth of the Rational Vote*, which is brand new, talks about how the message is finally not the issue (optimism/change) but that charisma is the key. Also Richard Ben Cramer's *What It Takes*, which is fine—and great writing. He talks about the 1988 primary and national election campaigns, and how that process worked.

Moebius: How did you become interested in local politics?

AH: I have always been active in charity groups. Here in SLO County, I was president of the Food Bank, and I'm on the Workforce Housing Coalition. These groups are essentially non-political but, by necessity, must be connected to local politics. I've also supported candidates for City Council who I believed in. I've always participated in candidate forums and I always voted. The reason that I decided to run for the Board of Supervisors is because of frustration with some of their decisions. I was willing to help another run against Lenthal, but no one came forward, and many suggested that I run. Here I am.

Moebius: What's your political philosophy?

AH: My political philosophy has evolved more and more as I have been involved in this local race. I strongly believe that compromise is necessary for city and county government to work, that it's easy to be a purist when you're on the outside. At the local level, I think more success comes from being a reasonable centrist. I have a lot of conversations with those who won't ultimately vote for me, but I like to understand their positions. I'd like to think that I have a moderating effect on these voters. I believe in firming up my base, in persuading people to vote for me even if they only agree with 80 percent of my positions; I want people to trust me and my judgments. There are no absolutes.

Moebius: What was your biggest surprise in entering the political arena?

AH: I think I was very surprised at how early I received support. Even before my announcement to run in June 2007, I had support of a number of elected officials. I was surprised at the willingness of many people to support me publicly after our conversations. Of course, this has been more work than I imagined!

Moebius: How did you develop your supporting network?

AH: I think through meetings and talking to people, I began to find a network of supporters. I'm also very interested in having discussions with those who oppose me in order to make clear what my positions are, so that there is no basis for rumors. I also saw that I needed to first firm up my base and then venture outside of it. Being fair and reasonable goes a long way with those who do not know me or think they disagree with my positions. I've come to believe that my best approach at the local level is to be independent of political parties. People want leadership.

Moebius: What expectations about your campaign were met?

AH: Amazing, but my fundraising goals were met, and I found the great volunteers that I had hoped to find.

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Moebius: How easy or difficult was it to get support for your candidacy?

AH: Getting public support from some elected officials is very difficult. They don't want to go public.

Moebius: Are Cal Poly students interested in local politics?


AH: I remember not being interested much in local politics until my senior year of college but I lived nearby. Generally, students are much more interested in national politics, especially this year. Obama is a big favorite on campus.

Moebius: What political organizations are popular at Cal Poly that relate more to national politics?

AH: A great organization is the Empower Poly Coalition, which is composed of various groups involved in many technological fields. Their own interests push them to become involved, in alternative energy, for example.

Moebius: What are the concerns of the electorate as you listen to them?

AH: Certainly growth is a big interest in the county. We live in a beautiful place, big but with low population. The question is how we develop. Retirees come here afraid that growth will come and make this area as bad as the places they left: they have concerns about traffic, water, crime, and safety. They want to avoid those problems. There is not much interest in homelessness nor in issues that involve low-cost housing. My job is to explain that these issues matter as well. We need inexpensive housing for those who are our first-responders: firefighters, paramedics, our government office workers, etc.

People want things to get accomplished; they're interested in the post-partisan approach to solving problems. I'm hoping to help lead this county in the next few years. 

Interview on behalf of Moebius conducted by Mary Kay Harrington, Winter 2008.